DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 074 964 HE 003 945

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TITLE	What Is, Or Should Be, The AGB? A Report from the Membership.
INSTITUTION	Educational Testing Service, Princeton, N.J.
REPORT NO	PR-72-28
PUB DATE	Sep 72
NOTE	18p.
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	*Governing Boards; *Higher Education; *National Organizations; *Organizations (Groups); *Professional Associations
IDENTIFIERS	*Association of Governing Boards

ABSTRACT

This document presents the results of a survey of member presidents and trustees of the Association of Governing Boards (AGB). The questionnaire employed several strategies for determining member needs and interests, and their perception of the role that the AGB should play in serving those needs and interests. First, a number of frequent concerns of trustees and presidents were listed, with the task for the respondent to rate not the importance of each, but rather their relevance for AGB attention. Second, respondents were asked to rate the desirability of present or prospective activities of AGB. Other questions were directed to reaction to content of AGB publications, meetings, and conferences, and to proposed new content. Finally, respondents were asked if AGB should take a more active leadership role, one less active, or remain about the same. Respondents were also given the option of writing a general answer to these concerns. This document presents a summary of the responses to the questionnaire. (Author/HS)

ED 074964

PR-72-28

WHAT IS, OR SHOULD BE, THE AGB?
A Report from the Membership

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HE003945

September, 1972

EDUCATIONAL TESTING SERVICE
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

WHAT IS, OR SHOULD BE, THE AGB?

INTRODUCTION

The Nature of the Survey

Having struggled gallantly over the years with the question of what is the proper role of the boards of control of institutions of higher education, the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, a membership organization of almost 500 boards representing over 800 campuses and almost 11,000 individual trustees and regents, felt it only prudent to ask the same question of itself. In May, 1972, its President wrote a key group of fifty-four individuals active in AGB affairs to ask what problems concerned them most at this point in time, and what they thought the scope of concerns and activities of the organization should be. From their replies, and with the assistance of the Southeastern office of Educational Testing Service, a brief questionnaire was constructed to obtain a broader sampling of the interests and needs of the membership. This questionnaire was mailed on June 1, 1972, with a cover letter from Edwin Shields Hewitt, chairman of the (AGB) Commission on the Future of AGB, to a sample of 911 member presidents and trustees selected at random from AGB mailing lists.

Content of the Questionnaire

This questionnaire (copy attached as an appendix) employed several strategies for determining member needs and interests, and their perception of the role that AGB should play in serving those needs and interests. First, a number of frequent concerns of trustees and presidents were listed, with the task for the respondent to rate not the importance of each, but rather their relevance for AGB attention. Second, respondents were asked to rate the desirability of present or prospective activities of AGB. Other questions were directed to reaction to content of AGB publications, meetings, and conferences, and to proposed new content. Finally, respondents were asked if AGB should take a more active leadership role, one less active, or remain about the same.

Respondents were also given the option of writing a general answer to these concerns.

Response to the Inquiry

As of August 15, 1972, questionnaires had been returned by 298 respondents, or 150 presidents, 112 trustees, and 36 members whose role could not

be determined (provision of name by respondent was optional).[1] In addition, ten presidents provided letter responses. The return rate of 34%, while disappointing, is not surprising. First, busy people were approached, many of whom have demands that do not permit them the luxury of time to respond. Second, the general concern of the questionnaire was not one likely to be a consuming personal or institutional concern for the respondent. Third, the number of open-end questions, while permitting highly individual response, may have in some instances required greater reader familiarity with AGB activities than he had, a handicap he might not be anxious to reveal. Finally, no followup request was made, a procedure that generally adds to response rate, particularly for individuals who have an administrative assistant to open and screen their mail or sort it into priority for attention. The general ETS experience is that return rate will vary in such instances from 20% to 45%, with the higher rates obtaining when the questionnaire involves little thought or effort, is centrally concerned with a matter of basic interest to the respondent (i.e., a survey of private college presidents by a state coordinating board on the desirability of public support), or is directed to that new office or agency on campus established to deal with the current questionnaire pollution that plagues our institutions of higher learning.

Given these considerations, it would seem that the response indicates a positive concern for and interest in the Association by its members. It can further be expected (and the depth and obvious thoughtfulness of the respondents' comments attests to this) that those who responded among those polled feel themselves very much the beneficiaries of AGB.

FINDINGS

What Do Members Think of AGB?

Several questions are aimed at the general role AGB should play. One asks if AGB should continue to direct its activities to presidents and trustees together: 96% of the presidents, and 88% of the trustees answer YES.

The presidents, four in number, and trustees, ten in number, who felt some activities should be directed only to presidents or trustees, had some obvious notions - i.e., that selection of, or relationship with, the

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[1] The responses of this group are not reported.

president - or investment policy, for that matter - only concerned trustees, or that the president's proper handling of the trustees is of concern to presidents. Two or three trustees said simply that AGB is not a president's organization and they are otherwise provided for, while one president felt trustees pay little attention to AGB concerns.

When asked if AGB should take a more or less active leadership role (or remain the same), 21% of the presidents felt a more active role should be taken, 57% stated "remain the same," none voted for a less active role, and the remaining 22 percent did not respond or stated "no opinion." For the trustees, response is almost identical, with 22% for more active role, 58% for AGB as it is, none for less active, and 20% no opinion or not responding. Those suggesting a more active role were asked "in what way?" The majority of the suggestions stressed the general information imparting role or stressed a favorite topic as deserving more attention. An occasional emphasis, to appear elsewhere, is a call for more regional meetings. Also included, however, was involvement in promoting legislation, provision of consulting and "crisis support," improving public visibility of current governance or higher education issues, creation of special programs for new trustees, and the establishment of an information exchange center.

What Problems Do Members Find Relevant for AGB Attention?

The degree of relevancy for AGB attention that the responding presidents and trustees award to selected topics listed on the questionnaire is shown in Table 1.

First, presidents and trustees tend on the whole to agree pretty well on the relevancy of the topics for AGB; and -- matters of greatest relevancy tend to be long-range planning (voted "particularly relevant" by about three-fourths of each group), financial support of the institution, and changes in governing board structure (each voted particularly relevant by about two-thirds of the respondents). The only other topic closely approaching this level, with emphasis stronger by the presidents than by the trustees, is the area of enrollment trends, which, as a current issue more of alarm than of happy prospect, relates both to long range planning and financial support.

A little more than half of the respondents, but less than two-thirds, see as particularly relevant personnel policy for faculty and administration,

Table 1

Members' Rating of Relevancy of Selected Problem Areas for AGB Concern

	Presidents' Ratings			Trustees' Ratings		
	Particularly Relevant	Of Some Relevance	Of Little Relevance	Particularly Relevant	Of Some Relevance	Of Little Relevance
Long-Range Planning	73	16	1	77	21	2
Trends: State Support for HE	68	21	1	68	27	4
Trends: Federal Support for HE	66	22	2	71	27	2
Fund Raising	66	21	3	54	29	12
Enrollment Trends	66	21	4	55	39	4
Changes: Governing Board Structure	65	21	6	64	26	7
Financial Aid	64	27	2	79	15	3
Personnel Policy: Faculty & Adm.	59	29	3	52	41	3
Selection of New Trustees	58	21	11	39	45	13
Curriculum Innovation	38	44	7	53	37	8
Investment Policy	53	28	11	38	38	21
Selection of a President	51	27	11	61	29	9
Termination of Some Existing Programs	49	36	8	49	39	12
Court Challenges	49	33	5	42	40	16
Adm./Faculty Salaries	45	41	3	36	52	12
Internal Operating Efficiency	41	43	5	43	40	13
Application of MIS	37	45	7	24	60	12
Building Program	37	38	15	24	41	30
Admissions Policy	35	44	11	28	51	16
Personnel Policy: Non-Acad. Staff	31	34	9	21	39	13
Fringe Benefits	30	49	10	17	67	13
High Level Manpower Needs	29	47	12	29	53	13
Future of the Black College	14	47	25	23	38	32
Alumni Affairs	21	51	17	21	49	25
Student Conduct	21	53	16	22	55	19
Student Militancy	12	62	15	22	59	14
Instit. Involvement: Faculty Affairs	21	52	11	17	59	20
Future: Athletic Program	19	37	33	13	48	35
Desegregation	17	44	26	15	49	32

*Figures given are the percent of respondents of the type indicated who rate the topics as shown. Row Percentages will not add to 100% because from 9 to 26% of the presidents, and from 1 to 26% of the trustees did not respond to the item; the number of responding presidents was 150, and, of trustees, 112.

and investment policy. Almost 60% of the presidents (but only 39% of the trustees) see selection of new trustees as particularly important, while 61% of the trustees and 51% of the presidents see selection of a president as an important concern for AGB. About half of the trustees, with 15% fewer presidents, see curriculum innovation as important for AGB attention.

A little less than half of the respondents vote relevancy to termination of some existing programs, court challenges, administrator and faculty salaries, and internal operating efficiency.

At lower and generally descending levels of relevancy for AGB appear such topics as building programs, admissions policy, fringe benefits, high level manpower needs, future of the black college, alumni affairs, and student conduct or student militancy. Only two problem areas listed, however, failed to obtain a two-thirds majority of respondents -- either presidents or trustees -- to state the issue was either particularly relevant or of some relevancy. These were desegregation and the future of the athletic program.

Other than the differences noted, trustees tend to declare areas to be "of little or no relevance" more frequently than do presidents; there is also an apparent trend for trustees each to pick fewer topics as of particular relevancy than do each of the presidents. It would seem clear that each type of respondent sees AGB as an instrument for the governing boards: the presidents seem to vote for those things they feel would be useful for their boards to a greater degree than the trustees seem to vote for things useful for their presidents. The concern for AGB is more one of governance, of course, than of administration or management.

Respondents could also write in other problem areas, an opportunity used by 18 trustees and 14 presidents. No particular category or theme pervades these suggestions; they appear to be restatement of areas already listed (e.g., "financial dilemma," or "student and faculty requests for membership on governing board," or "future shape of higher education".) New areas receiving more than one vote are tenure, accountability, and unionization.

What Services Should AGB Provide?

Respondents were asked to react to a list of ten services (or write in ideas for services) that AGB should provide its membership. These fall into four general areas: communication and dissemination of information,

training, provision of consultants, and commission or conduct of research. The results, shown in detail in Table 2, reveal respondents see the ideal AGB role as that of being principally a center and service for dissemination of information, whether through its publications or its conferences. An unusually desirable activity would also seem to be the training of new trustees. The members see less frequently as a desirable service the commissioning or conduct of research, or the identification or provision of speakers or consultants. (Most suggestions beyond the list of services called attention to a special problem area, or asked for regional conferences, or conferences or publications for a special class of institution -- the medical school, the private liberal arts college, etc.).

The AGB Publications

Members were asked whether they preferred, in AGB Reports, commissioned "think" or opinion pieces, reports of situations or events, reviews and syntheses by AGB staff and members, or something else. The think or opinion piece by an expert is preferred most frequently by both presidents (59%) and trustees (62%). Reports of situations or events on the nation's campuses receive a preferential vote by 41% of the presidents and 52% of the trustees, while AGB staff or member syntheses appeal to 36% of the presidents and 32% of the trustees (percentages add to more than 100 because members frequently checked more than one preference). Write-in preferences included several entreaties to keep the AGB Reports "short and to the point," or listed a topic of special interest.

When asked to state in their own words what AGB reports or papers have been found most useful, the respondents named specific papers in some instances, topical areas in others, or simply AGB Reports, Notes, or Newsletters in others.[2] Most frequent for both presidents and trustees were topics that could be categorized under "The Nature of the Trusteeship" -- the role of the trustee, trustee problems, governance, president/trustee relationship, etc. Finance and long-range planning also appear, as do concerns with the role, mission, or obligations of the college, but with less frequency. Finally are a list of highly specific institutional problems not classifiable under the foregoing categories -- campus unrest, faculty relations, curriculum, academic freedom --and, popular with the presidents -- different approaches to tenure.

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[2]It is a credit to the membership that only one president thought the EPE 15-Minute Newsletter to be AGB's best effort.

Table 2

Desirability of AGB Services, as Perceived by Responding Presidents and Trustees

Service	Proportion of Presidents Rating			Proportion of Trustees Rating		
	Very Desirable	Of Some Interest	Of No Interest	Very Desirable	Of Some Interest	Of No Interest
Keep members posted	72	18	0	80	15	2
Provide forum	66	25	0	63	29	2
Newsletter	35	47	8	40	43	12
Summarize National Meetings	26	51	14	29	46	18
Train new Presidents	37	37	15	33	38	20
Train new Trustees	68	21	2	56	31	8
Commission research	38	43	9	41	38	11
Conduct research	31	43	13	34	39	19
Provide consultants	29	50	13	25	46	21
Identify speakers	16	59	15	20	55	16

Trustees and presidents were asked to name one recent topic presented by AGB found to be particularly interesting or relevant. About 60% of the respondents replied, with many -- particularly the presidents -- citing specific titles and authors. For example, Nelson's "Lay Trustee - Up or Out?" mentioned by more than 5% of all respondents, appeared equally popular with trustees and presidents. Also popular was the recent (February, 1972) "Models of Campus Governance." Kerr, Kirkpatrich, Partridge, Greenleaf, Buchanan, Cheit, Pifer were names remembered and cited. The Cincinnati, Williamsburg, and Boston meetings and topics therefor were named, though the tendency was to react to a paper topic or a problem area rather than the meetings in general.

An attempt to impose a categorical scheme on topics and reports listed again shows as most popular the area that can be called "the nature of the trusteeship," involving governance, selection of trustees, trustee role, etc. Half of the responses of each group -- presidents and trustees -- fell in this area. Two other popular areas for both presidents and trustees were finance and long-range planning, and, with the presidents, college mission, and, with the trustees, the selection of the president. Special topical areas included the statewide coordinating board, faculty evaluation, collective bargaining, non-traditional study, tenure, role of women, and student conduct. Tenure was the only one of these topics approaching mention by 5% of the respondents.

When asked what topics respondents would like to see in future AGB reports, response was again relatively vigorous, with more than one-third of the presidents and almost two-thirds of the trustees responding. Again the most popular area was the role of the trustee. Trustees tend to be highly pragmatic, and ask rather directly such questions as: "What policies should we develop?" What makes a successful or a "working" Board? Beyond this kind of topic, responses range over a great variety of issues. Finance is still popular, as is long-range planning; but marked now is the respondent's leaning on personal conviction (i.e. one requested more on the role of the secretary of the board as a "coordinator concerned with continuity and follow-up of issues), or current specific problem -- president-board relationship, use of graduate students as instructors, faculty load, mergers, salary scales, and management efficiency. The faculty-trustee relationship, and (again) collective bargaining came in for multiple mention.

Reading interests and needs may represent a more direct and behavioral way to search out the membership than is their recognition of certain problems and topics as popular issues. Taking the language (and sometimes the titles) used in expressing what members read or would like to read, listen to or would like to listen to, it would seem that a relatively clear split develops -- not between presidents and trustees, but between those struggling with day-to-day or board meeting-to-board meeting questions of "how do trustees operate?" -- as opposed to the old pros, who, with this question safely behind them, turn to problem areas of particular interest.[3] Concern seems seldom to be with such questions as how higher education can serve societal needs or with practices at other institutions. Instead, their eyes and thoughts seem to be focused rather squarely on the agenda of the next meeting of their Board. Some trustees ask "How do I respond?", others, "What is the solution?"

The Preferred Format for AGB Meetings and Conferences

Within each group -- presidents and trustees -- only some 40% ventured suggestions about the preferred format for the meetings. Among the responding presidents, about a dozen stated the present format is fine, or they commented they liked particularly one or another recent meeting. The greatest preponderance of suggestions, however, seemed to have something to do with the pace of the meetings and the opportunities for personal involvement, either formal or informal. The cry is for more give and take, more group sessions, more "working sessions," more leisure for informal contacts, fewer major speakers. Some presidents recommend special sessions for presidents or board chairmen only. Several presidents opt for regional meetings, or meetings on a state basis, or meetings directed toward a particular group of like institutions.

The responding trustees echo, though not as strongly, the concern pervasive among the presidents for more opportunity to interact with speakers and others in attendance. They also call more frequently for regional meetings or special meetings for trustees of particular kinds of institutions, or group meetings by type of institution served within the larger meeting. The trustees, beyond this, tend to be distracted from format to the notion of topics of special interest -- of import to note at this point because it

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[3] One old "pro" indeed requested a report on the "excessive questionnaires received by presidents."

reinforces the previous interpretation of the strongly pragmatic nature of their interests. More than the presidents, they seem not to come to meetings to have a meeting, but to get a better feel for their role as trustees or to get some hard-headed ideas on problem solution.

Topics Suggested for AGB Meetings

The most popular topics with the respondents for AGB meetings and conferences show in some respects, among the presidents, a pattern close to that revealed by previous data -- that is, a heavy emphasis on governance and the role of the trustee, on finance and on long-range planning. The trustees echo the emphasis on governance and finance, but a new emphasis tends to emerge for both presidents and trustees -- that of matters concerned with the operation of the institution. For the presidents, this has to do with responsibilities of the faculty, revitalization and innovation, evaluation of teaching effectiveness, student recruitment, faculty salaries, public image of the institution, academic programs and curriculum offerings, and grantsmanship. For the trustees, the presidents' concerns with tenure, innovations and curriculum are echoed, but added are faculty productivity, cost-efficiency studies, student conduct, personnel policy, collective bargaining, administrative efficiency. The flavor of the language shows that once past the popular areas of general role of trustee and finance, the presidents are concerned with management as academicians, and the trustees with management as overseers or governors.

Summary and Conclusions

In general: the survey of AGB members tends to give a rousing vote of confidence to the Association and its modus operandi. Both presidents and trustees see it now and in the future as primarily a trustee's organization, but for trustees and their presidents. Although the portion of the sample polled who did not respond is more likely to contain malcontents or individuals not overwhelmed with AGB, criticisms are virtually non-existent; if anything, the mood is for a more active role by AGB in its publications and conference-staging role.

The membership further indicates that their concerns are with their effective performance of their basic role as governors of their institutions (or, if presidents, in facilitating that role). Although not disinterested in philosophical concerns or in national issues, they are most precisely concerned primarily with their institution and responsibilities thereunto. Some evidence was noted to support two classes of members in effect: those relatively new to the trusteeship, who are concerned with their day to day stance as trustees; and, the "old pros," who, with a comfortable board tenure behind them, are highly preoccupied with highly pragmatic concerns -- sometimes specific, but more frequently in the area of finance or aspects of institutional functioning with implications for cost efficiencies. New areas of concern -- court challenges, what to do about tenure -- are just beginning to emerge. Some concerns of recent years -- student militancy, control of faculty -- are barely apparent.

The survey, in the opinion of the reporters, points subtly to some conclusions. AGB, while something less than a consuming fraternal order for its members, has served real interests and needs. It has provided the presidents a welcome and compatible ally in helping trustees perform more efficiently as trustees must perform. The information dissemination role has served the constituents well, and can be conservatively expanded. And, while understanding that members individually look more specifically at their particular current institutional problems, the President and the Commission on the Future should recognize their continuing responsibility to be concerned not only with member interests but also member needs, some of which are but perceived dimly. Their major demand, in this process, is: keep it to the point, and useful.

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Dear President or Trustee:

The Commission on the Future of the Association of Governing Boards is conducting a formal review of A G B functions and role, with particular emphasis on improving services to the membership. We have asked the Educational Testing Service to assist us in this review.

Would you please take time to respond to the attached questionnaire? Or, if more convenient, you may write us a brief note as to any of the following three questions.

(a) What topics would you most like to hear about in A G B papers, conferences, etc.?

(b) What problems of interest or concern to the board of trustees are you experiencing at this time on your campus?

(c) What new services would you be interested in receiving from your membership in A G B (i.e. new publications, special workshops or conferences, etc.)?

Your assistance will be most valuable in helping us improve the services of A G B to its members.

Sincerely,

Edwin Shields Hewitt

Edwin Shields Hewitt

Questionnaire on Desirable Roles for AGB

Note: The Association of Governing Boards is re-examining its functions, services, and role in American Higher Education. This questionnaire is provided as a vehicle for quick and efficient reporting of your ideas, suggestions and preferences. Please give it your careful and thoughtful attention. Your ideas will serve substantially to help the AGB Advisory Council strengthen the activities of AGB in terms of your needs and interests.

1. Below are listed a number of problem areas that concern many trustees and college administrators. How relevant do you feel each of these is for AGB attention?

	Particularly Relevant	Of Some Relevance	Of Little Or No Relevance
(1) student militancy	( )	( )	( )
(2) financial aid	( )	( )	( )
(3) selection of a president	( )	( )	( )
(4) personnel policy: faculty and administration	( )	( )	( )
non-academic staff	( )	( )	( )
(5) admissions policy	( )	( )	( )
(6) termination of some existing programs	( )	( )	( )
(7) investment policy	( )	( )	( )
(8) building program	( )	( )	( )
(9) student conduct	( )	( )	( )
(10) future development of athletic program	( )	( )	( )
(11) enrollment trends	( )	( )	( )
(12) changes in structure of governing boards (size, authority, inclusion of students, etc.)	( )	( )	( )
(13) state/national high-level manpower needs	( )	( )	( )
(14) internal operating efficiency (scheduling, pupil/professor ratio, etc.)	( )	( )	( )
(15) application of management information systems	( )	( )	( )
(16) fringe benefits	( )	( )	( )
(17) administrator and faculty salaries	( )	( )	( )
(18) institutional involvement in faculty affairs	( )	( )	( )
(19) court challenges (trustee regulations in regard to freedom of speech, etc.)	( )	( )	( )
(20) desegregation	( )	( )	( )
(21) future of the Black college	( )	( )	( )
(22) fund-raising	( )	( )	( )
(23) long-range planning	( )	( )	( )
(24) alumni affairs	( )	( )	( )
(25) selection of new trustees	( )	( )	( )
(26) trends in federal support for higher education	( )	( )	( )
(27) trends in state support for higher education	( )	( )	( )
(28) curriculum innovation	( )	( )	( )
(29) Other (please specify: _____	( )	( )	( )
_____	( )	( )	( )

2. Below are listed a number of activities in which AGB could engage in service to its membership. How desirable do you feel each of these services would be? (For each activity listed check one alternative of the three provided.)

	Very Desirable	Of Some Interest	Of No Interest or Not Applicable for AGB
(1) provide training for new presidents	( )	( )	( )
(2) provide training for new trustees	( )	( )	( )
(3) provide forum for exchange of ideas and views	( )	( )	( )
(4) keep members posted re new issues, problems, solutions, etc.	( )	( )	( )
(5) provide consultants	( )	( )	( )
(6) identify speakers for special conferences, professional meetings, etc.	( )	( )	( )
(7) provide summaries of other national meetings for membership	( )	( )	( )
(8) be a newsletter for members	( )	( )	( )
(9) commission research studies or "think pieces" on relevant topics	( )	( )	( )
(10) conduct research studies on relevant topics	( )	( )	( )
(11) Other (specify):_____	( )	( )	( )
_____	( )	( )	( )
_____	( )	( )	( )

3. Of the various reports and papers published by AGB, what have you found most useful (topics, types of publications, etc.)?

4. What kind of articles would you prefer to read in the AGB Reports? (Please circle)

   a. "Think" or opinion reports by knowledgeable people commissioned by AGB.

   b. Reports of situations and events over the nation's campuses.

   c. Reviews and syntheses by AGB staff and members.

   d. Other (please specify): _____

   _____).

5. Should all AGB activities continue to be directed to presidents AND trustees together? ☐ YES ☐ NO

   If NO: a) What activities should be directed to trustees only?

   _____

   _____

   b) What activities should be directed to presidents only?

   _____

   _____

6. a. Name one recent topic presented by AGB which you found particularly interesting or relevant.

   b. What topics would you like to see included in future AGB reports?

7. a. What would you like to see established as the general format for AGB meetings and conferences?

   b. What topics would you like to see highlighted at these meetings and conferences?

8. From what sources (publications, conferences, people, etc.) do you usually obtain information to help you cope with and solve the problems which face you as a president or trustee?

9. Considering the current role of AGB: AGB should take (check one):

☐ A more active leadership role. (If checked, please state in what ways AGB should become more "active.")

_____

_____

☐ A less active leadership role. (If checked, please state in what ways AGB should be less "active.")

_____

_____

☐ AGB should remain about the same.

☐ No opinion.

10. What would you suggest as new areas of service for AGB?

COMMENT: (Please use this space for any comment you may have on the improvement of AGB role and services):

Name (optional) _____

Institution _____

Role _____ (Pres., Chairman of Governing Board, Trustee, etc.)

If trustee: a) Trustee committee chairman or memberships _____

b) Number of years' service as a trustee _____

c) Number of institutions on whose boards you currently serve _____

d) Your age _____

Please return this questionnaire in the envelope provided to:

AGB Study Director
Educational Testing Service
501 Willard Street
Durham, N. C. 27701